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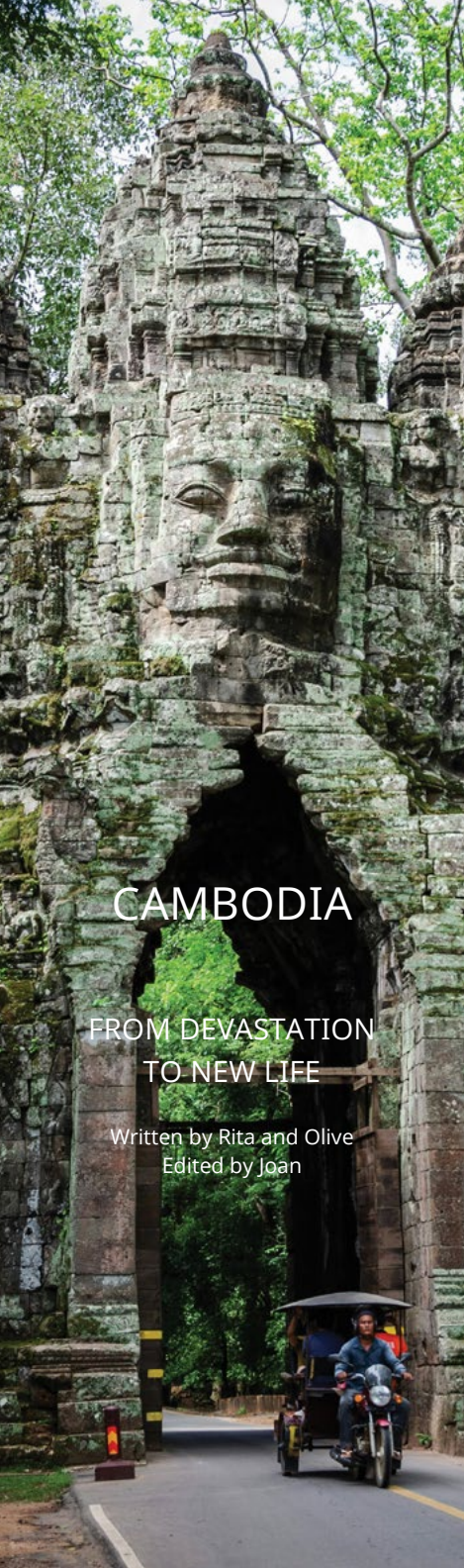
MISSION PATHWAY

PRAY FOR THE UNREACHED

CAMBODIA



CROSSROADS
PRODUCTIONS

A large, ancient stone archway, likely from the Khmer Empire, featuring a prominent carved face of a deity or ruler. The archway is made of weathered stone blocks and is surrounded by lush green trees. A paved road leads through the archway, and a person on a motorcycle is visible in the foreground.

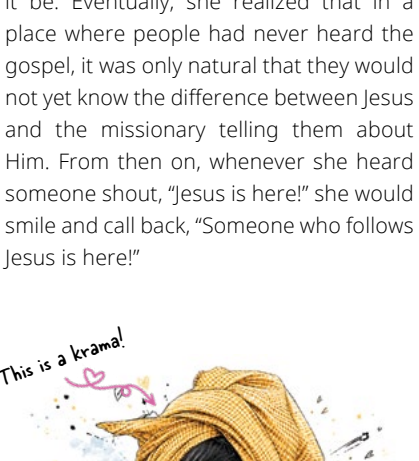
CAMBODIA

FROM DEVASTATION TO NEW LIFE

Written by Rita and Olive
Edited by Joan

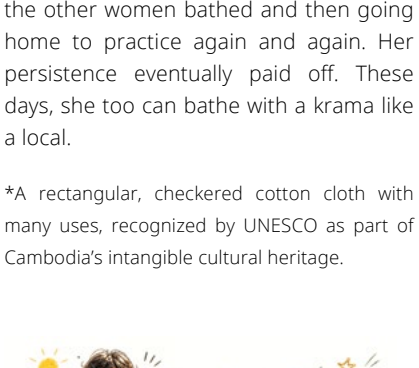
Missions in Cambodia: Think Thrice Before You Act

French architect Maurice Glaize praised Angkor Wat for the balance of its composition, the harmony of its proportions, and the elegance of its lines, placing it among the world's great architectural achievements. After seeing this UNESCO World Heritage Site for ourselves and reading up on Cambodian history, it is easy to come away feeling that we understand Cambodia and its people. But knowing a country's monuments is not the same as knowing its people. Reading its history does not mean we understand what lies in people's hearts. Especially when the gospel enters a village or a home, or finds its way into a discussion about bathing or a casual conversation about children, we begin to realize how much we still have to learn about the people of Cambodia. The stories that follow may surprise you again and again. When it comes to the people of Cambodia, there is always more to discover.



"Jesus Is Here!"

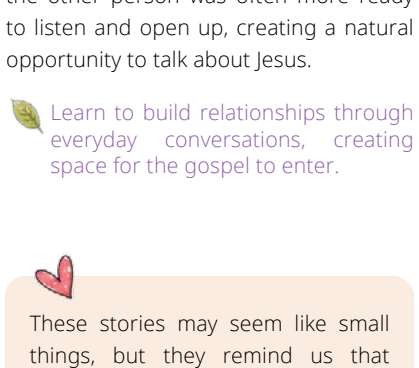
Whitney responded to God's call and went to serve in rural Cambodia. At first, whenever the villagers saw her, they would call out, "Jesus is here!" She hardly knew whether to laugh or cry, much less whether to correct them or simply let it be. Eventually, she realized that in a place where people had never heard the gospel, it was only natural that they would not yet know the difference between Jesus and the missionary telling them about Him. From then on, whenever she heard someone shout, "Jesus is here!" she would smile and call back, "Someone who follows Jesus is here!"



Learning to Bathe

One of the first things a missionary in Cambodia has to learn is how to bathe. In Cambodia's heat, a cool bath is a welcome pleasure. But Whitney never expected bathing itself to become such a challenge. It wasn't that she didn't know how to wash. The challenge was figuring out how to bathe outdoors alongside everyone else, wrapped in a krama,* without accidentally exposing herself. She tried asking local women how they did it, but they thought she was joking. So she had no choice but to teach herself, discreetly watching how the other women bathed and then going home to practice again and again. Her persistence eventually paid off. These days, she too can bathe with a krama like a local.

*A rectangular, checkered cotton cloth with many uses, recognized by UNESCO as part of Cambodia's intangible cultural heritage.



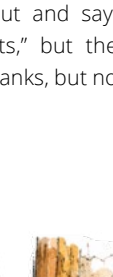
Talking about Children

Whitney probably never imagined that not having children could become a conversation starter in ministry. Cambodia is largely an agricultural society, where another child can mean another pair of helping hands and someone to care for the family in old age. So the older women in the village would often approach Whitney and offer to let her raise one of their children. Over time, she realized that rather than responding with, "That's none of your business," what mattered more was keeping the conversation going and allowing the relationship to grow. Once they had finished talking about children, the other person was often more ready to listen and open up, creating a natural opportunity to talk about Jesus.

Learn to build relationships through everyday conversations, creating space for the gospel to enter.

These stories may seem like small things, but they remind us that missions is never simply about taking a message from one place to another. Long before people hear the gospel, their lives have already been shaped by their language, family values, daily habits, and religious beliefs. Missionaries therefore need to learn not only how to relate to people, but also how to communicate the gospel clearly.

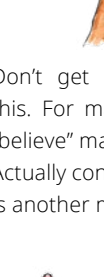
Three Essentials for Sharing the Gospel with Cambodians



Being a good person, doing good deeds, and speaking kindly are all important. But never forget to actually share the gospel and speak about Jesus. As Scripture says, "faith comes from hearing the message." This is at the heart of why God sends missionaries.

Share the gospel in the language people know best. This is not only a matter of respect, but also a practical necessity. If you cannot speak even a little Khmer, much of what you say about the gospel may be only partially understood.

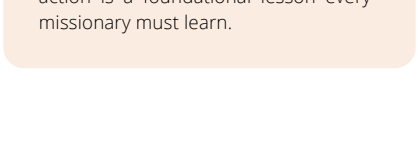
Be ready to clear up misconceptions about the gospel. Some may believe, for example, that Christians are not allowed to laugh, or that becoming a Christian means missionaries will give them money or even a car. Misunderstandings like these need to be patiently clarified again and again so that people can hear the gospel for what it truly is.



Three Common Responses Cambodians Give to the Gospel



They may not come right out and say, "Khmer people are Buddhists," but the message is often the same: thanks, but no thanks.



These are a minority within a minority: new believers who, within Cambodia's already small Christian community, are trying to persevere in their faith despite criticism, isolation, and contempt from family and neighbors. Yet these very trials may also be refining their faith.

Don't get too excited when you hear this. For many Cambodians, saying they "believe" may simply be a polite response. Actually converting and living out the faith is another matter entirely.

So Why "Think Thrice" About Missions in Cambodia?

Missions in Cambodia requires careful thought because missionaries need time to build relationships with local people, learn how to enter into their culture, and work through questions of how the Christian faith should be contextualized within the local worldview. Learning how to observe, how to live among people, and how to communicate the gospel clearly are all challenges missionaries face on the field. That is why thinking things through again and again before taking action is a foundational lesson every missionary must learn.

A Critical Transition Amid Multiple Challenges

Cambodia's Government



Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet with then-Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in 2023.

In recent years, Cambodian politics has centered on Prime Minister Hun Manet. With a background in both the military and economics, he has also sought to engage with the private sector in addressing the country's investment and development needs.

Under his leadership, Cambodia's economy has continued to grow, foreign investment has remained strong, and its cities have continued to develop rapidly. Yet the country remains heavily dependent on exports and foreign investment, with a relatively concentrated industrial base that leaves it vulnerable to changes in the global economy. Cambodia is expected to transition out of the United Nations' Least Developed Country category in 2029. As preferential trade arrangements are gradually withdrawn, major export industries such as garments, rice, and bicycles will face significant challenges, making economic transformation increasingly important.

Political power in Cambodia has long been concentrated, and in recent years journalists and citizens have been charged or detained for expressing their views. New laws also allow citizenship to be revoked under certain circumstances, prompting concern and debate. Challenges surrounding public trust in institutions and communication between the government and the public further complicate the country's economic transition. Authorities have also carried out large-scale crackdowns on scam compounds, though their effectiveness remains to be seen.

For a country that is both growing and rebuilding, how its leaders balance stability with openness, strengthen its institutions, and build greater resilience into its economy will be key to navigating this transition successfully.

Heavenly Father, guide Cambodia's leaders as they carry out the responsibility You have entrusted to them. Amid the many challenges they face, lead them in the way of truth and help them make wise decisions with a long-term vision, bringing lasting stability and hope to their country. May those in authority be willing to listen to voices different from their own, understand the needs of the people, and foster greater communication and trust, so that the nation's institutions may gradually be built on a foundation of stability and justice. May Cambodia's development pursue not only economic growth, but also the wellbeing and dignity of its people. Lord, turn the hearts of the Cambodian people toward Your eternal and righteous kingdom, and draw them to seek Your presence. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Eight Decades of Upheaval

A Brief Modern History of Cambodia

When people think of Cambodia's suffering, the Khmer Rouge regime of the 1970s often comes first to mind. In less than four years, nearly a quarter of the country's population died under its rule, leaving Cambodian society devastated. Yet the struggles of modern Cambodia cannot be explained by this period alone. Beyond the horrors of Khmer Rouge rule,¹ the country also endured decades of instability, competing governments, and foreign intervention.

During World War II, the French colonial authorities placed the young Norodom Sihanouk on the Cambodian throne in 1941, believing he would be relatively easy to influence. In 1945, after Japan removed the French colonial administration, Sihanouk declared Cambodia independent. French control soon returned, but in 1953 Sihanouk ultimately succeeded in securing full independence for Cambodia. In the years that followed, Sihanouk maintained relations with Communist China and North Vietnam while suppressing the Khmer Rouge at home, forcing them into the jungle, where they gradually gained strength with support from the Vietnamese Communists.

In 1970, Prime Minister Lon Nol ousted Sihanouk in a coup and aligned Cambodia with the United States. From exile in China, Sihanouk allied with the Khmer Rouge, whose influence grew with his support. The Khmer Rouge captured Phnom Penh in 1975, and Pol Pot became prime minister the following year, beginning a four-year reign of terror.

In 1979, Vietnamese forces overthrew the Khmer Rouge, and former Khmer Rouge commander Hun Sen rose to power under the new Vietnamese-backed government. He consolidated control in 1997 and remained prime minister until 2023, when power passed to his son, Hun Manet.

In less than eighty years, Cambodia has undergone one upheaval after another. Even today, the country continues to heal from the wounds of its past as it searches for a way forward.

1 The Khmer Rouge, literally "Red Khmer," was the communist movement that ruled Cambodia from 1975 to 1979 under Pol Pot.

Heavenly Father, may the people of Cambodia come to know You as the God who draws near to them and upholds them with Your unfailing love. You are sovereign over Cambodia's past, present, and future, and You know all that this land has endured through political upheaval, war, violence, and deep trauma. Heal the wounds left by history and give every Cambodian a peace that the world cannot take away. May they find hope in the midst of fear. Lord, You have entrusted people with the responsibility to govern and care for the land. May Cambodia's leaders and decision-makers turn to You in humility, relying not on human power or wisdom but following the leading of Your Spirit. Help them govern faithfully, so that the nation's future institutions and leadership may reflect Your justice, compassion, and truth. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

The Aftermath of the Khmer Rouge I



Photo by Chetan Hireholi on Unsplash

The nine Cambodian founders of Phare Ponleu Selpak grew up in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge and spent part of their childhood in a refugee camp along the Thai-Cambodian border. In 1994, they returned to Battambang and founded PPSA, whose Khmer name means “Brightness of the Arts.” They hoped to create a space where Cambodians could express painful experiences through art and begin to heal from wounds that were difficult to put into words.

Severe depression, sleep disturbances, panic, and difficulty controlling violent impulses are among the problems commonly associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in the aftermath of Khmer Rouge rule. The effects can even reach the next generation, as children unconsciously pick up patterns of behavior from their parents, affecting their sense of self-worth, brain development, and emotional growth.

When trauma becomes a collective experience, it affects more than individual mental health. Over time, it can also shape the way a society responds to its past. Much of Cambodia’s modern history has been written by outsiders, while many Cambodians have been reluctant to speak about what happened. Some attribute this silence to the Khmer Rouge’s destruction of the education system and the resulting loss of people equipped to record and interpret their own history. At a deeper level, many people learned that the safest course was not to think or speak about politics at all. Saying “I don’t know” and keeping things as they were became ways to survive.

Some scholars have characterized Cambodians as “submissive” or “lazy” in explaining resistance to change. But such descriptions overlook the country’s history. Again and again, dramatic change in Cambodia has come with violence and death. If change has so often meant danger, is it surprising that people might hesitate to embrace it?

Heavenly Father, You see how deeply the wounds left by the Khmer Rouge still run. Many lives remain marked by this trauma, not only among those who lived through that period, but also in the generations that followed and in society as a whole. Lord of healing, bring restoration to wounded hearts and minds, and give rest to those still bound by fear. May local churches become safe places where those who grieve are accompanied and those who are hurting are received with care. Raise up Christians with expertise in the arts, psychology, medicine, education, and other fields. Grounded in the love of the cross, may they gently help mend wounded lives and take part in Your work of renewal in Cambodia. We pray especially for Phare Ponleu Selpak and its arts programs. Provide the resources they need, and may art become a vessel for hope and truth. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Orphans

The Aftermath of the Khmer Rouge IIw



For most people, the loss of a loved one can affect them for the rest of their lives. When children are separated from their parents or lose loved ones because of national upheaval, the wounds can leave a particularly deep mark on their lives.

During Khmer Rouge rule, people were forced into collective labor camps, tearing families apart and separating countless children from their parents at a young age. One survivor recalled, “Before my mother was taken away, she cried and told me to take care of my little brother.” He and his brother hid with several other children among piles of prisoners’ bloodstained clothing, then crept into the kitchen at night to eat pig feed.

Many people died from starvation and disease. Those considered political enemies of the regime were imprisoned, interrogated, and executed at facilities such as Security Prison 21 (S-21).¹ The purges shattered countless families, forcing many children to grow up in orphanages. For some children, no one knew their original names, so they took the name of the orphanage as their surname. Others later joined the military, determined to prevent such tyranny from happening again.

Today, those children have reached middle age, and many still weep when speaking about their parents and the Khmer Rouge. The effects of the regime’s violence did not disappear when its rule ended. They continue to shape a generation of orphans who grew up surrounded by loss, influencing how they understand family, identity, and their country.

1 Now the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, formerly Security Prison 21 (S-21), a Khmer Rouge detention, interrogation, torture, and execution center.

Heavenly Father, You are a Father to the fatherless and a refuge for the wounded. Amid the deep trauma left by the violence of the Khmer Rouge, You did not abandon the children who survived. Lord, You defend the cause of the fatherless. According to Your faithful promises, sustain this generation of Cambodian orphans. Amid fear, poverty, and painful memories, may they experience Your protection, presence, and healing. Raise up churches and Christians to serve the people You love through education, counseling, and practical care, so that wounded hearts may find restoration through the gospel. May the government respond to the wounds of history with compassion and mercy, providing appropriate support and opportunities for those who have suffered to rebuild their lives. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

The “Perfect” Woman

Cambodian Women I



In traditional Chinese culture, expectations of women were sometimes summed up in the saying, “A woman without talent is virtuous.” In Cambodia, an ancient didactic poem known as the Chbap Srey, or “Rules for Women,” offers its own portrait of the “ideal woman.” Originally passed from mothers to daughters as advice before marriage, the poem gradually became an influential guide to women’s behavior, placing much of the responsibility for maintaining harmony in the family and society on women.

The Chbap Srey gives instructions on how women should dress, speak, and walk, as well as how they should obey their parents and husbands and respect their elders. Its values have also been shaped by Theravada Buddhist beliefs about virtue and merit. While the poem was intended to promote virtue and harmony, some of its teachings have had troubling consequences in practice. Its emphasis on patience and obedience, for example, as well as the belief that family problems should remain private, can make domestic violence easier to conceal. Even when women seek help, they may be blamed for failing in their responsibilities or disturbing family harmony, placing an additional moral burden on them.

Until 2007, students were required to study the Chbap Srey as part of the school curriculum. After the Ministry of Women’s Affairs called for changes, much of the text was removed, although shortened portions continued to be taught for some time. Today, many urban women regard its teachings as outdated. Yet in more conservative families, older women still pass them on to younger generations, leaving traditional and contemporary values in continuing tension.

Heavenly Father, You created both men and women in Your image and regard every life as precious and good. You see how teachings passed down through generations have shaped the lives and behavior of Cambodian women, and You understand the desire behind them to preserve harmony and care within families and communities. May Christian marriages be a testimony, as husbands and wives share responsibilities and live with mutual respect and care, drawing others to You. Lord, when Cambodian women face injustice or violence at home, bring Your justice and protection. Make a way for them to receive support and healing. May churches and missionaries in Cambodia share the gospel with humility and compassion, offering women the good news of new life in Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Empowering Working Women

Cambodian Women II



Photo by Chetan Hireholi on Unsplash



Further Reading

In 2021, handmade leather sandals woven with rush grass by Cambodian women became a hit in Taiwan. They came from SALASUSU, a social enterprise with roots in efforts to combat human trafficking in Cambodia. Its Japanese founders came to see greater economic independence for women as one way to address the problem and began providing vocational training and employment for women in rural Cambodia. In 2016, she launched the initiative in rural Cambodia that would later become SALASUSU.

“Sala” means “school” in Khmer, while “susu” is an expression of encouragement meaning “keep going” or “you can do it.” SALASUSU is both a local fashion brand and a social enterprise that provides work and training for disadvantaged women between the ages of 16 and 24. It has helped more than 600 women support their families.

Applicants are recommended by local village chiefs and assessed through home visits. Those selected receive two years of handicraft and soft-skills training, including basic Khmer literacy. They are also provided with transportation to and from work, nutritious lunches, and childcare. Toward the end of the program, SALASUSU provides career counseling and partners with local NGOs and social enterprises to help women who have gained literacy skills find long-term employment in restaurants, hotels, and other service industries.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for the vision behind SALASUSU and its desire to care for “the least of these.” Bless and strengthen the work of their hands, and may it bring greater stability to the lives of vulnerable women in Cambodia. Guide the women who receive training through SALASUSU, and lead them into workplaces where they are respected and protected from oppression and exploitation. Raise up faithful, humble, and compassionate Christians and missionaries who, whether through SALASUSU or through business as mission, will reach out to women with Your love and follow Christ’s example of serving others. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Being a Journalist in Cambodia

Freedom of the Press



The news media is often called the “fourth estate” in Taiwan. It is also the First Amendment in the United States Constitution. Journalists do more than report information; they also hold governments accountable and preserve a truthful record of society. Ideally, journalists should be free to report and ask questions without censorship, interference, or punishment. In Cambodia, however, that space has grown increasingly restricted.

Mech Dara is an independent Cambodian journalist who has long reported on sensitive social issues such as human trafficking and scam compounds. Because of his reporting, he was charged under the criminal code with offenses including inciting social unrest and held in pretrial detention for more than a month. Although he was later released on bail, the experience ultimately led him to announce his departure from journalism. Other journalists in Cambodia have faced similar situations.

Cambodia has remained near the bottom of Reporters Without Borders’ World Press Freedom Index for years, reflecting a broader decline in press freedom since 2017. Independent media outlets have gradually disappeared, including The Cambodia Daily and Voice of Democracy (VOD), leading many journalists to turn to social media to share information. Yet when reporting on issues of public concern, journalists must continually weigh the risks involved. As self-censorship becomes more common, it becomes increasingly difficult for the public to hear the full story.

Heavenly Father, as speaking out and asking questions become increasingly difficult, we thank You for the Cambodian journalists and international organizations that continue working to provide balanced reporting. Protect them and give them the grace and courage they need to persevere despite pressure and risk. May their reporting help society learn to listen to different voices. Help the Cambodian people develop greater media literacy and gain a fuller understanding of what is happening in their country through a variety of sources. May churches in Cambodia also use this information to pray for their nation. Continue to call Christians with a heart for journalism to be “shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves,” remaining faithful to You and bearing witness to You in Cambodia. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Beyond Medical Expertise

Professional Ethics in Healthcare



8-Photo by Gustavo Fring on Pexels

Have you ever worried that a healthcare professional might have the medical skills but lack the professional ethics to match? Many Cambodians share this concern.

Half a century ago, many of Cambodia's healthcare professionals died from starvation, disease, or execution under the Khmer Rouge, leaving the country's healthcare system in ruins. Although Cambodia has gradually rebuilt its medical system and facilities, professional ethics in healthcare remains an important public concern.

Public hospitals commonly struggle with long waiting times, outdated equipment, and staff shortages. But patients have also expressed frustration with healthcare workers who are indifferent or even rude, a lack of respectful and professional communication, and little patience in listening to patients. Nonprofit organizations have also raised concerns about nepotism within the healthcare system, which can prevent capable professionals from putting their skills to good use. Reports of pharmacies overcharging customers or operating without proper licenses have further weakened public trust in healthcare.

In response, the Cambodian government and nonprofit organizations have called for greater attention to professional ethics in healthcare. All patients should receive equal care regardless of ethnicity, religion, or background. Healthcare workers should treat patients fairly, encourage appropriate medical care and medication use, and help address inequities within the system. These efforts can foster a more trustworthy healthcare workforce and improve the quality of public hospitals.

Heavenly Father, guide Christian healthcare workers in Cambodia to see their work not simply as a duty, but as a fragrant offering to You. May the love of the cross inspire them to treat every patient with gentleness, patience, and wisdom, even amid busyness and pressure, faithfully providing professional and respectful care. Lord, may these Christians influence their colleagues, becoming salt and light in hospitals and in society and helping to strengthen professional ethics in healthcare. May decision-makers invest the resources needed to address current challenges and establish laws suited to the local context, rebuilding public trust in the healthcare system. May hospitals appoint qualified professionals to the right positions and help lay the foundation for a healthcare system that is more stable, fair, and respectful of human dignity. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Mending the Cracks in Education

Education



Before marrying Khmer Rouge leader Pol Pot in 1956, Khieu Ponnary reportedly spoke of her dream that every Cambodian child would be able to attend school. More than seventy years later, has that simple yet far-reaching dream been realized?

After Cambodia gained independence from France in 1953, the king pledged to make education a foundation for the country's future. But growing conflict and political turmoil in the late 1960s brought educational development to a standstill. When the Khmer Rouge took power in 1975, teachers and intellectuals were killed or forced into exile, schools fell into disrepair, and the education system nearly collapsed. An entire generation saw their education abruptly interrupted by conflict.

Since then, Cambodia's education system has gradually recovered. In 2020, the literacy rate among people aged 15 and above was about 88%, nearly ten percentage points higher than in 2008. Yet the lasting effects of the country's traumatic history remain. Shortages of teachers and infrastructure mean that many public primary schools can offer only half-day classes. Teachers often take additional jobs at private schools to make ends meet, making consistent teaching difficult. In rural areas, some students travel five to ten kilometers along muddy roads each day to reach school and may also face the risk of human trafficking along the way. Children from poor families are often forced to work after finishing primary school, while families with greater resources turn to private schools, further widening the educational gap between rich and poor.

These challenges show that Cambodia's education system is still carrying the weight of a painful history.

Heavenly Father, Cambodia's education system has long been shaped by the pain and fear left by war. You have seen this land lose teachers and schools, and in Your compassion You have gathered the tears of its people. Bring Your healing to the wounds of the past, restore broken memories, and give Cambodia strength to move its education system forward. Raise up Christian teachers from Cambodia and abroad to serve in its schools with the humility and compassion of Christ. May they commit to walking alongside students for the long term, living out the hope of the cross and becoming a steady presence in their lives. Move local churches to value students and educational ministry and to walk alongside children and families in rural communities. Grant wisdom and resources to the government and NGOs as they develop educational approaches that are appropriate for and respectful of the local context. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Longing for Clean Water

Safe Drinking Water



At a five-star hotel in Phnom Penh, clean tap water flows reliably, a reflection of a water supply system that has been hailed as one of Cambodia's great success stories. Yet just an hour's drive away, the picture can be very different. Around 12 million Cambodians still lack access to safely managed drinking water, revealing a stark divide between urban and rural communities.

Villages along the Mekong have relied on groundwater for generations, seeing it as a vital source of life. Yet naturally occurring arsenic can seep into well water, and long-term exposure can cause skin lesions and increase the risk of cancer. Poor sanitation also allows bacteria to spread through water during the rainy season, contributing to repeated diarrhea and malnutrition among children and affecting their development. As medical expenses mount, illness and poverty can become a vicious cycle.

Yet change is quietly taking place. In communities such as Preah Dak, nonprofit organizations are introducing solar-powered water purification systems, turning murky, rust-colored, bitter well water into water that is safe to drink. To outsiders, this may simply look like technological progress. But for local families, it can mean giving their children a healthier start in life. These efforts are not only about survival, but also about protecting the next generation.

Heavenly Father, amid the stark differences between Cambodia's cities and rural communities, guide the country's decision-makers to understand the unequal distribution of water resources and the real needs of the people. May policies better reflect those needs and resources be distributed more fairly. Give the government wisdom and a sense of responsibility as it continues to improve water supply and sanitation systems, helping to break the cycle of disease and poverty. When children's health is affected by unsafe water, may they receive the medical care and protection they need to grow up healthy. Bless all those working to improve access to safe water, and may their efforts continue to grow and reach more communities. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

A Life of Endless Debt

Microloans



Photo by Clear Path International on Flickr

Since the 1990s, Cambodia has used microloans as a way to help poor families improve their lives. Yet over the years, reports have emerged of borrowers losing their land, their health, and even their lives because of mounting debt. How did this happen?

Microloans are small loans offered to low-income borrowers. Because they are loans rather than charity, and lenders must account for the risk of default, interest rates tend to be relatively high. In 2017, Cambodia capped annual interest rates on new microfinance loans at 18%, but even this can be a heavy burden for poor families. Ideally, borrowers use the money to start a business and gradually repay the loan as their income grows. In Cambodia, however, many borrow to cover basic expenses such as healthcare and education, which do not directly generate income. As a result, debts can accumulate and create a vicious cycle.

Many microloans are secured with land as collateral, leaving borrowers who cannot keep up with repayments at risk of losing it. Anonymous executives in the industry have acknowledged that some lenders regularly pressure clients to sell their land. The microfinance industry has defended the use of property as collateral as a way to reduce lending risk.

Researchers have argued that Cambodia also needs stronger public healthcare and education systems, along with higher household incomes, so that people do not have to rely on loans to meet basic needs or risk losing their land because of debt.

Heavenly Father, You see the Cambodian people burdened and oppressed by microloan debt, and You grieve with them. Comfort them and bring relief to those weighed down by debt, renewing their strength in Christ. May local churches be salt and light, reaching out to these families, walking alongside them in hardship, and showing them the love and hope of Christ. May Cambodia's banks develop healthier and more just lending practices that truly help people manage financial needs, plan wisely, and cope with unexpected hardship. Give the government compassion and wisdom to address the deeper causes of this problem by strengthening healthcare and education and helping people increase their incomes, so that they no longer have to take on crushing debt simply to meet basic needs. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Toward Reconciliation

Mediating the Cambodia-Thailand Border Conflict

Cambodia and Thailand have repeatedly clashed over disputed areas along their border, including territory surrounding ancient Hindu temples such as Preah Vihear. Following an earlier conflict in 2008, fighting broke out again in July 2025. Although a ceasefire was briefly reached in December through U.S. mediation, it quickly collapsed. By December, the conflict had displaced more than 110,000 families, killed at least 43 soldiers and civilians, and forced hospitals near the border to evacuate patients. The toll of the conflict continues to grow. The roots of the conflict go back more than a century to borders ambiguously drawn during the French colonial period, parts of which remain disputed by the two countries today.

As tensions escalated, outside mediation became increasingly important in preventing the conflict from spiraling out of control. China sent diplomatic envoys to both Cambodia and Thailand, urging restraint and dialogue, while Cambodia turned to the United States for support. Malaysia, then serving as ASEAN chair, also worked to bring both sides back to the negotiating table. France, which sees itself as bearing some historical responsibility for the border dispute, joined the mediation efforts as well, seeking to remain neutral while preventing further casualties.

The hope is that countries involved in mediation will prioritize lasting reconciliation and stability rather than their own interests or influence. Otherwise, even another agreement may simply postpone the next conflict.

National Interests and Domestic Politics

Politicians in both countries have at times taken a hard line on border issues to strengthen domestic support or divert attention from political crises at home. Nationalist sentiment is easily stirred when national territory is at stake, making border disputes a powerful way to rally public support.

Heavenly Father, we cry out to You over the historical wounds that have long divided Cambodia and Thailand. Jesus Christ broke down the dividing wall of hostility through His own body, making Jews and Gentiles one. May that same peace come to the border between Cambodia and Thailand. Heal families broken by conflict, provide for those who have been displaced, and bring rest to those living under the shadow of war. We declare that true peace does not come from human schemes, but from You. We pray for the nations involved in mediation. May their leaders fear You, seek Your wisdom and compassion, set aside the pursuit of their own interests and influence, and become instruments of reconciliation. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Unending Grace

Protestant Christianity in Cambodia



In January 2023, Protestant churches from across Cambodia gathered in Phnom Penh to celebrate 100 years since the arrival of the country's first long-term Protestant missionaries in 1923. Some 35,000 believers from across the country joined the celebration, bearing witness to God's ongoing work in Cambodia. In this predominantly Buddhist nation, Christians make up only about 0.3% of the population, something Cambodian believers see as the fruit of many years of prayer.

Looking back, American missionaries came to Phnom Penh to preach the gospel, train pastors and church leaders, and translate the Bible into Khmer, a translation that remains in use today. In 1965, amid the Vietnam War and growing anti-Western sentiment, Protestant missionaries were expelled from the country. Many feared that the church would decline. Instead, Christianity grew rapidly over the next decade.

Then came the severe persecution of the Khmer Rouge era, during which an estimated 80 percent of Cambodian Christians died. Yet survivors began rebuilding the church, meeting secretly in small groups to encourage one another and hold on to their faith.

At the 2023 centennial celebration, an elderly pastor spoke with deep emotion. This, he said, was the future his spiritual mentors had longed to see. Most had been killed during the Khmer Rouge era and never had the chance to witness what the Cambodian church had become.

Heavenly Father, we give You thanks and praise. Through the work of missionaries and mission teams in Cambodia, You have shown Your unchanging and faithful love for all peoples. Thank You for planting the seeds of the gospel in those who came before, strengthening their faith, and raising up disciples to follow You from generation to generation. In a society and culture deeply shaped by Theravada Buddhism, guide Your children to find ways to share the gospel with those around them. May more Cambodians hear the life-changing good news and turn their hearts toward You. Call churches in Cambodia's cities to send workers into rural communities, serving through education, healthcare, and other ministries so that the gospel may reach every part of Cambodia. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Will Prahok Disappear?

Mainstream Khmer People



The Mainstream Khmer, also known simply as the Khmer, are Cambodia's largest ethnic group, making up more than 90% of the population, or around 16 million people. Khmer communities can also be grouped by where they live, including the Northern Khmer and Lower Khmer.¹

Mainstream Khmer cuisine is deeply shaped by the natural environment, and few foods are more representative than prahok, a fermented fish paste with a history stretching back centuries. Making prahok takes considerable work. Freshwater fish are scaled, gutted, cleaned, and chopped, then dried in the sun for a day before being salted and fermented into a paste. It can be stir-fried with pork, added to soups, or eaten with rice. Known for its strong aroma, prahok is sometimes called "Cambodian cheese." Making good prahok is considered a sign of culinary skill.

Traditionally, the older generation made prahok entirely by hand. Today, much of the commercial process has been mechanized, but many people still prefer to buy fresh fish at the market and make their own at home. One woman interviewed said that Khmer people could hardly live without prahok and that making it had become part of their way of life. Yet she worried that younger generations seemed less interested in learning the tradition and that, after her generation was gone, the practice might eventually disappear.

1 Khmer people live across Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam. Those in Cambodia are known as Mainstream Khmer, those in Thailand as Northern Khmer, and those in southern Vietnam as Lower Khmer, or Khmer Krom.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the skills and wisdom You have given the Mainstream Khmer throughout their history. Through food, they not only preserve their traditions but also experience Your provision for their daily needs. May younger generations value and carry on the tradition of making prahok, connecting with their heritage and preserving it for the future. We entrust the many Mainstream Khmer people to You. You know each one and call them by name. May they have opportunities to hear the gospel and come before Your throne in worship. Raise up missionaries and Christians who respect Khmer culture and find natural connections between the gospel and the traditions of everyday life, helping people see that You are the Creator and Provider of all they need. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Living on the Margins in Thailand

The Northern Khmer People of Thailand



The Khmer Empire once ruled parts of what is now Thailand, leaving behind Khmer communities whose descendants are known today as the Northern Khmer. Over the centuries, they put down roots in Thailand and gradually became integrated into Thai society. Today, they live mainly in the northeastern Isan region and parts of eastern Thailand. In 2015, their population was estimated at around 1.5 million, making them the largest non-Thai-speaking ethnic group in Thailand. Yet despite their numbers, they have often been described as an “invisible minority” in Thai society.

Beginning in the 1930s, Thailand promoted a strong nationalist identity, and members of the ruling elite at times portrayed the Northern Khmer as “degenerate Thais,” reinforcing negative stereotypes about them. Longstanding tensions between Cambodia and Thailand added to this stigma. After the 1962 dispute over Preah Vihear Temple (see October 12), strong anti-Cambodian sentiment arose in Thailand. Authorities even required Northern Khmer communities to destroy religious texts and prohibited the use of Khmer in religious settings. Over time, Khmer came to be regarded as a local dialect rather than a distinct language.

In this environment, many younger Northern Khmer came to distance themselves from Cambodia and emphasize their Thai identity. Older generations have often retained a stronger sense of Northern Khmer identity, while remaining cautious about expressing it publicly. For many, identifying primarily as Thai has also brought practical social and economic advantages.

Heavenly Father, thank You for watching over the Northern Khmer people from generation to generation and sustaining them in the land of Thailand. You know the wounds they have carried from being marginalized and burdened by negative stereotypes because of their ethnic identity. Bring healing to these wounds and prepare gospel messengers who will come among them with humility and love, sharing the grace of the cross. May the Northern Khmer know that they are created in Your image, fully accepted by You, and that in Christ they have an identity and hope that cannot be taken away. Lord, make a way for them to experience greater acceptance and belonging within Thai society. May the gospel also become a bridge of reconciliation between Thai and Northern Khmer people, bringing them into peace with one another through the sacrifice of Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Keeping Khmer Alive

The Khmer Krom People of Vietnam



Photo by Sam Sith on Wikimedia Commons

Historically, the Khmer Empire extended into the Mekong Delta, now part of Vietnam, where many Khmer people settled. Their descendants came to be known as the Khmer Krom, the Khmer people of Vietnam. According to Vietnam's 2019 census, more than 1.3 million Khmer live in the country, most of them in the Mekong Delta.

The Khmer Krom have long lived along the Mekong, which has sustained their farming and daily life for generations. Cattle are important partners in agricultural work, and the Khmer Krom traditionally do not slaughter them or eat beef, reflecting the close relationship between people and their animals. Each year, government-sponsored ox races attract visitors and give the Khmer Krom an opportunity to celebrate their agricultural heritage. For participants, having the value of their own cattle recognized often matters more than the prize money.

Today, however, the Khmer Krom face challenges in passing their culture on to the next generation. One Khmer Krom monk observed that children attending Vietnamese-language public schools have fewer opportunities to systematically learn Khmer or become familiar with Theravada Buddhism, the traditional faith of the Khmer people. To help bridge this gap, he began offering Khmer and English classes at the temple during school holidays, helping younger generations maintain a connection with their cultural heritage.

Heavenly Father, thank You for nourishing the land through the Mekong River and for providing cattle to help the Khmer Krom in their work. Through generations of life in Vietnam, Your faithful care for all peoples has never ceased. Lord, as the Khmer Krom depend on the river and their animals, may their hearts also long to know the Creator who provides all these gifts. May the Holy Spirit prepare their hearts to hear the gospel. Raise up Christians and churches in Vietnam and elsewhere who will serve the Khmer Krom with wisdom and humility. Through Khmer-language education, practical care, business as mission, and other ministries, may they enter their communities as trustworthy neighbors and witnesses of peace. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Families on the Water

Vietnamese Cambodians



Photo by Curtis Foreman on Flickr

The situation of Vietnamese Cambodians is closely tied to the long history between Cambodia and Vietnam. In the seventeenth century, the Vietnamese Nguyễn dynasty and the Cambodian royal family intermarried, and Vietnamese people were encouraged to settle in Cambodia. During the French colonial period, Vietnamese migration was again encouraged to meet labor needs. By the late 1960s, after Cambodia had gained independence, King Sihanouk began restricting Vietnamese immigration. At the time, around 450,000 Vietnamese were living in Cambodia. Beginning in 1970, large-scale anti-Vietnamese violence forced about 200,000 Vietnamese to leave the country. After the Khmer Rouge took power, around 170,000 more were expelled, while another 30,000 died from starvation, disease, and massacres. Vietnamese people gradually began returning only after the fall of the Khmer Rouge.

Even before the Khmer Rouge era, many Vietnamese Cambodians had settled on Tonlé Sap Lake, building floating communities on the water. Among the bamboo houses, schools, clinics, temples, churches, police stations, and shops gradually developed, forming largely self-sufficient communities.

Yet the legacy of this history continues to shape the lives of Vietnamese Cambodians today. Many lack citizenship documents and are treated as illegal immigrants, leaving them unable to own land or access formal employment. Their children may also struggle to obtain household registration or enroll in public schools. These structural barriers have kept many Vietnamese Cambodians on the margins of society.

Heavenly Father, Vietnamese Cambodians have lived with fear and insecurity for many years, and many have lost loved ones through times of upheaval. Gently heal their wounds and bind up their broken hearts. Even today, many continue to live with uncertainty and neglect. May they encounter You and know You as their unshakable refuge. Send churches and missionaries to communities around Tonlé Sap and throughout Cambodia. Through long-term presence, education, practical advocacy, and other forms of care, may they live out the compassion and justice of the gospel and lead people to You. Give the Cambodian government wisdom and compassion to respond to the needs of Vietnamese Cambodians, establishing policies that protect human dignity and improve the circumstances of those living on the margins. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Searching for Faith

The Cham People



Photo by J  r  my Couture on Wikimedia Commons

In Cambodia, where Theravada Buddhism is the dominant religion, the Muslim Cham are a distinct minority. But the Cham were not always Muslim. Over the centuries, their religious beliefs have undergone several changes.

In earlier times, the Cham worshiped the earth goddess, believing that she ruled over the land and its crops, reflecting a way of life closely tied to the land. By the third and fourth centuries, Hinduism had begun to influence Cham society, although ancestor worship remained central to everyday religious life. Mahayana Buddhism later became more widespread, and some Cham adopted the faith. By the fifteenth century, increased contact with Arab traders gradually led more Cham to embrace Sunni Islam.

Today, the vast majority of Cham are Muslim and fall into three main groups. The largest are Cham-speaking Sunni Muslims, who have been strongly influenced by Malaysia and the Middle East. The Jahed Muslims pray only on Fridays and consider themselves orthodox Muslims, while remaining relatively resistant to outside influence. The Chvea Muslims are also Sunni, speak Khmer and Malay, and maintain close ties with Malaysia and Java.

According to 2019 statistics, around 600,000 Cham live in Cambodia, with others living in Vietnam, Malaysia, and elsewhere.

Heavenly Father, thank You for giving the Cham people hearts that are open and willing to seek You. You see them searching for meaning in life through different faiths and cultures. Jesus Christ became flesh to seek those who are lost. May the Holy Spirit work in their hearts, leading them to know You and receive the hope that comes from You. Raise up well-equipped missionaries who are willing to walk alongside them for the long term. Give them wisdom to learn the language, culture, and beliefs of the Cham, and help them enter their daily lives with humility, patience, and love, engaging in sincere conversations about faith with respect. Watch over the Cham as they live in a predominantly Buddhist society. May they be treated with respect and experience peace within their families and communities. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Blood and Sacrifice

Chinese Cambodians



Photo by zhang kaiyv on Unsplash

Chinese communities around the world celebrate Lunar New Year in different ways, but for many, the festivities come to an end after several days as businesses reopen and people return to work. In Cambodia, however, some Chinese communities conclude the new year with a three-day Spirit Parade, known as Hei Neak Ta. The tradition was brought to Southeast Asia by migrants from southern China around the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Their descendants continue to take part today, remembering their ancestors and carrying on the tradition.

During the ritual, dozens, sometimes nearly a hundred, spirit mediums are believed to be possessed by traditional Chinese Buddhist and Daoist deities such as the Monkey King and Nezha. They scrape their tongues with blades until they bleed, then lick yellow paper talismans¹ before distributing them to worshippers. Some initially resist becoming spirit mediums, fearing the pain and blood involved in the rituals, but eventually take on the role out of fear of punishment from the deities.

During the procession, attendants walk alongside the mediums, caring for them, keeping order, and scattering rice or rice wine to “clear the way” for the spirits. Some people admire the mediums for the sacrifices they make on behalf of the community, while others value the close bonds formed among those who take part. For many, the event is not only a religious ritual but also an important expression of community and belonging.

1 Believed to bring good fortune and ward off misfortune.

Heavenly Father, You sent Jesus to shed His blood and give His life for the world, accomplishing redemption on the cross and revealing Your desire to seek and save people from every nation. May Chinese Cambodians hear the gospel and, through the work of the Holy Spirit, understand that only the blood of Christ can truly cleanse and bring peace, so that they may willingly turn to You. May missionaries walk alongside them with respect, understanding, and cultural sensitivity as they reflect on what it means to honor their ancestors. Help them see that the Christian faith does not reject tradition, but directs our gratitude and glory to the God who gives life. May every spirit medium encounter the risen Lord, be renewed in heart, and become a witness for Christ. May Chinese Cambodians see the love Christians have for one another in everyday life, be drawn by it, recognize the beauty of Your kingdom, and be willing to enter the church. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Shattered Dreams of Prosperity

Indonesians in Cambodia



Cambodia and Indonesia share deep historical ties. In ancient times, kingdoms based in what is now Indonesia once ruled parts of present-day Cambodia. People traveled frequently between the two regions, and their architectural traditions influenced one another, with similarities visible in landmarks such as Angkor Wat and Indonesia's Borobudur.

In modern times, Cambodia and Indonesia established diplomatic relations in 1959 and signed a visa-free agreement in 2010, encouraging greater travel and trade between the two countries. By 2025, the number of Indonesians in Cambodia was reported to have reached 160,000.

In recent years, however, media reports about Indonesians in Cambodia have often been linked to scam operations. In January 2026, more than 2,000 Indonesians sought help from the Indonesian Embassy in Cambodia after becoming caught up in scam operations. They are currently waiting to be repatriated to Indonesia while their cases are investigated. Facing financial pressure and difficulty finding work at home, many had come to Cambodia hoping for job opportunities, only to end up working in scam operations.

The situation has prompted different responses. Some believe those involved should face legal consequences. Others argue that the circumstances surrounding their recruitment still need to be clarified and that they should not all be judged in the same way. Still others see the situation as a reason to reflect on Indonesia's broader economic and employment challenges.

Heavenly Father, may churches in Cambodia welcome and walk alongside Indonesians living there, so that they may hear the gospel and new believers may be nourished in the truth, becoming a blessing wherever they go. Protect Indonesians who are looking for work, so that they are not deceived or coerced into working in scam operations. We also pray for those who knowingly choose to take part in such work. May they desire a holy life, be willing to face the law, and turn away from wrongdoing. Give law enforcement wisdom and a sense of justice as they investigate recent scam cases, so that those who are innocent or have been exploited receive protection and fair treatment. Give the Indonesian government wisdom to address the country's economic and employment challenges. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Fifty Years of Gospel Witness

The Mnong People



Photo by Aviva West on Flickr

Nearly a hundred years old, Tot Nhernh still clearly remembers how he came to faith. During the Vietnam War, relentless American bombing forced him and his family to flee Cambodia for Vietnam. The experience of displacement left deep scars. As a member of the animist Mnong people, he also feared that failing to perform rituals for the spirits of the dead would bring misfortune. Even after his family rebuilt their lives in Vietnam, they continued to live with grief and fear for many years.

Then several Vietnamese Christians came to visit the Mnong who had fled to Vietnam. They shared God's love with them and testified that Jesus Christ could set people free from every form of bondage. Tot recalls that his fear disappeared, replaced by a peace and freedom he had never experienced before. He decided to follow Christ.

After the Vietnam War, Tot returned to Cambodia with a passion for sharing the gospel. He preached to his own people and planted churches, but at the time, they still had no Bible they could read in their own language.

Translation of the New Testament into the Mnong language had already begun in Vietnam in the 1960s. Although the Mnong in Vietnam and Cambodia spoke the same language, they used different writing systems, making the Vietnamese version inaccessible to Cambodian Mnong readers. In 2016, around half a century after the end of the Vietnam War, the Cambodian Mnong finally have a completed New Testament. The joy on Tot's face was unmistakable.

Editor's note: The Mnong are a cross-border ethnic group living in both Cambodia and Vietnam.

Heavenly Father, through the life of Tot Nhernh, we see Your patient love and Your desire that no one should perish. Heal the wounds the Mnong people carry from war and displacement. May Your love bring healing to their pain, fear, and loss, and raise up churches to offer comfort and walk alongside them. May the Bible in their own language be used powerfully to lead the Mnong people to hunger for truth, know Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit, and willingly entrust their lives to You. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

A Comforting Melody

The Tampuan People



Photo by Ethan Crowley, Ethan Crowley Productions on Wikimedia Commons

A Tampuan person sings softly: “Though we may be far apart, we still love and support one another, helping each other through difficult times.” This comforting song dates back to the Khmer Rouge era and has been passed down ever since. Amid fear and instability, the Tampuan secretly composed and sang songs in their own language, bringing comfort and reassurance to their people.

Music has long been deeply rooted in Tampuan life. Children grow up surrounded by music and learn to play various instruments from an early age. Among the many forms of Tampuan music, gong and drum music is especially beloved. Traditionally, music has been at the heart of weddings, funerals, harvest celebrations, courtship, and religious ceremonies. It carries the values and wisdom of the community while also providing entertainment in everyday life.

Today, the Tampuan are giving new life to their traditional music. Young people are working with nonprofit organizations to organize and document traditional songs, produce research publications, and record instruments, songs, and ceremonies, preserving a record of their culture. At the same time, they continue to compose new songs in the Tampuan language on practical topics such as cultural identity, language preservation, and health education, connecting their traditions with life in a new generation.

Heavenly Father, thank You for sustaining the Tampuan people through the Khmer Rouge era and giving them strength to endure. When fear surrounded them, You enabled them to encourage one another through song, making music a source of comfort. Heal the wounds of the past and fill them with the true peace that comes from You. Lord, You are the source of creativity and beauty. Bless Tampuan youth as they preserve their music and culture, and may their efforts strengthen their community. Send spiritually mature workers with gifts in music who will enter Tampuan communities with humility and respect. Through musical exchange, may they bear witness to the gospel, so that the Tampuan may hear Your loving call in every melody and run to You, the Lord who delights to draw near to all peoples. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Guardians of the Forest

The Kuy People



Photo by Conor Wall on Wikimedia Commons



Life among
the Kuy People

The Kuy are a long-established indigenous people living mainly in northern and northeastern Cambodia, with communities also found along the borders with Thailand and Laos. Their way of life has long been closely tied to the forest. Many Kuy families depend on gathering resin, honey, medicinal plants, and timber, along with small-scale farming, for their livelihood.

Kuy culture is deeply influenced by animist beliefs. They see the forest and land as more than just the natural environment; they are also home to ancestral and other spirits, such as Ah'ret, associated with the forest, and Neak Ta, guardian spirits of the land and village. Before cutting trees, farming, or holding weddings, people may make offerings and seek the spirits' blessing. These beliefs have also shaped the way the Kuy use forest resources sustainably, such as tapping trees for resin without destroying them.

Yet protecting the forest has not brought prosperity, and many Kuy families still live in poverty. In recent years, large areas of forest have been designated by the government as economic land concessions for rubber and cashew plantations, often without consulting the Kuy communities. Together with illegal logging, this has seriously affected their livelihoods. As the forests they have protected for generations gradually disappear, the Kuy are losing more than their land. They are also losing the continuity of their culture and a foundation of their traditional beliefs.

Heavenly Father, remember the deep connection between the Kuy people and the forest. Though they do not yet know You, they have long cared for the natural world around them. As the forests disappear and life becomes more difficult, comfort families in their anxiety and grief. Help them continue to support one another, and raise up Christians to walk alongside them through these changes. May the Cambodian government be filled with Your compassion and recognize that the Kuy are losing more than resources; they are losing roots that are deeply tied to the land. Guide the government to develop appropriate policies that support their livelihoods and the future of their communities. Move Cambodian society to respect and understand the Kuy, and to learn from them how to care for the natural environment and protect its ecosystems. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Growing with the Longhouse

The Jarai People



Photo by Jarai Rith on Wikimedia Commons

The Jarai are an indigenous people living in northeastern Cambodia and the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Two distinctive features of Jarai culture are their matrilineal family system and their tradition of living in longhouses.

Family lineage is passed down through women, children take their mother's family name, and after marriage, the husband moves in with his wife's family. Property is generally inherited by daughters, with the youngest daughter, who often takes primary responsibility for caring for her parents, usually receiving the largest share.

In traditional villages, longhouses are built of bamboo and wood and raised above the ground. As the family grows, another section is added to the end of the house. Some longhouses can stretch up to 50 meters, with a long corridor connecting each new household. At night, elders tell stories of their ancestors and teach children to sing, weave, and identify plants and water sources in the forest. In this way, traditional knowledge is passed from one generation to the next under the same roof.

In recent years, extensive logging and plantation development have reduced the forests of northeastern Cambodia, while some Jarai farmland has also been taken over by companies, putting their livelihoods under pressure. As the forests disappear, the timber and bamboo needed to build longhouses have become harder to find. Smaller homes are gradually replacing longhouses, while the rise of nuclear families is changing traditional Jarai ideas of family. Many young people are also drawn to mainstream culture, widening the gap between generations. As longhouses disappear, the cultural memories passed down by their ancestors seem to be fading along with the forests and homes that once sustained them.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the close bonds within Jarai families and for their willingness to support and care for one another, making the home a place of warmth and rest. As ways of life and family structures change and distance grows between generations, mend their hearts so that love may continue to flow between them. We also cry out to You for their land. As farmland is reduced by development and traditional ways of life come under pressure, may the Jarai seek You amid these changes and discover in You an identity and hope that the world cannot take away. May Your compassion move the Cambodian government to understand the challenges facing the Jarai and help them find new ways to sustain their livelihoods. May their culture and memories not be forgotten, but continue to be passed on to future generations. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

The Gospel Sprouts in the Cracks

The Brao People



Photo by Haen Somkhan on Wikimedia Commons

There are around 60,000 Brao people worldwide, about 14,000 of whom live in the mountainous regions of northeastern Cambodia. Traditionally, they have relied on slash-and-burn farming for their livelihood. Nearly all practice animism, sacrificing livestock in rituals to seek blessings from the spirits.

In the 1990s, Cambodia adopted a new constitution guaranteeing religious freedom, and foreign churches and missionaries began entering the country. At first, communities in the northeast, where many Brao live, strongly resisted Christianity. Even so, a small number of Brao chose to become Christians.

Local nonprofit workers have expressed concern that when different religious groups emerge within the same community, friction and conflict can increase, and peaceful coexistence requires intentional effort from both sides. Scholars have also noted that highland peoples, including the Brao, have long faced economic and cultural disadvantages. The introduction of Christianity may therefore affect existing ethnic bonds and make an already complex situation even more challenging.

The government has also viewed Christianity with some caution. Although it has not been officially prohibited, missionaries have reported facing obstacles in their work. As a result, low-profile house churches have gradually emerged among the Brao, and missionaries are often reluctant to disclose where they work or how many believers there are.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your mercy toward all peoples and for bringing the gospel to the Brao through churches and missionaries from abroad. Give those serving among them humility and wisdom, so that they not only proclaim the gospel but also take time to understand and respect Brao culture, bearing witness to the love of Christ through genuine relationships. Strengthen the new believers among the Brao. May they be rooted in truth and grow under the leading of the Holy Spirit. Help them love their neighbors and relate wisely and graciously to family members who do not yet believe, being "shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves." May they become people of peace who help strengthen their communities. Send people with expertise in economic development to help improve the livelihoods of the Brao people. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Losing Their Mother Tongue

The Stieng People



In Cambodia, the Stieng live mainly in the eastern provinces of Kampong Cham, Kratié, and Mondulhiri, with a population of around 6,000 to 7,000. Another 100,000 or so live in neighboring southeastern Vietnam.

Stieng is not currently among the Indigenous languages taught in Cambodia's primary schools. The reasons are complex: there is a lack of teaching materials in Stieng, a serious shortage of teachers, and many Stieng communities are located in remote areas where getting to and from school is difficult for both teachers and students. Many students also come from poor families that struggle to afford expenses such as school uniforms, and children are often needed to help with farming at home, contributing to high dropout rates. Limited government efforts to implement relevant policies have created further challenges for Stieng-language education. Together, these factors are putting the transmission of the language at risk.

Today, older generations still speak mainly Stieng at home. Younger people, however, have been strongly influenced by mainstream culture and may feel inferior when interacting with Khmer people. As a result, many prefer to speak Khmer rather than their mother tongue, creating a break in the transmission of Stieng between generations. Scholars have therefore called for expanded bilingual education in Stieng, better teacher training, and poverty-reduction measures to help prevent the language from disappearing.

Heavenly Father, we place in Your hands the Stieng people's concern as their mother tongue gradually fades. Comfort them in their worry and loss. Raise up missionaries and Christians with linguistic gifts to take part in Stieng Bible translation, education in their mother tongue, and cultural preservation, so that this precious language may be passed on and the Stieng may hear the gospel in a language they know well. Move the government to develop policies that preserve the Stieng language and promote Stieng-language education. Raise up NGOs to serve in remote villages, providing educational support and helping improve transportation and livelihoods, so that children do not lose the opportunity to learn because of poverty and families can build more stable lives. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

A Fading Identity at the Border

The Lao People in Cambodia



Photo by toastal on Flickr



Lao people in
Cambodia

In the early morning, while mist still hangs over the Mekong, a small parcel carefully wrapped in banana leaves is placed before an ancestral grave. In the dim light before dawn, the leaves are gently opened to reveal steaming sticky rice, sweet cakes, and seasonal fruit. After the offerings are made, the family gathers beside the grave and shares the food according to tradition. This is a distinctive way that Lao communities in Cambodia observe Pchum Ben, the Festival of the Dead. While most Khmer people make offerings to monks at temples, the Lao preserve older traditions that blend ancestor worship with Buddhism.

The Lao have lived in northeastern Cambodia for centuries. In 1904, the French colonial government transferred Stung Treng Province from Laos to Cambodia, suddenly changing the national identity of the people living there. Over time, younger generations were increasingly educated in Khmer, and the Lao language gradually faded from public life. As their way of life became more similar to that of mainstream Cambodian society, the Lao also found it difficult to gain legal recognition as an “indigenous people,” leaving them unable to apply for collective land titles that could help protect their land.

With forests being developed and dams being built, Lao communities without legal protection must continue negotiating with the government under difficult circumstances or turn to small-scale informal cross-border trade for a living. For these people living along the border, the gradual loss of identity and land is quietly reshaping their future.

Heavenly Father, the Lao people are precious to You. You understand the challenges they face living along the border and the difficulty of having their identity go unrecognized. As they seek a place where they can be seen and understood, walk with them and help them hold on to hope and dignity. With limited legal protection, their livelihoods are often unstable. Remember their hard work and provide for their daily needs. Move the government to respond to their needs and develop appropriate policies that protect the rights of Lao communities. May missionaries and Christians enter Lao communities and follow Christ's example of coming alongside people with love and compassion. May they offer faithful companionship and practical help, so that more Lao people may turn to You and come to know Your love. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Inside the “Love Hut”

The Kreung People



Dating reality shows today often bring attractive young men and women together and give them the freedom to explore romantic relationships. Interestingly, the Kreung people of Cambodia have their own traditional courtship custom with some striking similarities.

When a girl turns 15, her parents build a small bamboo “love hut” beside the family home. The hut is both an expression of their care and a sign that she is old enough to begin choosing a future spouse. It gives her some distance from her family and the freedom to get to know young men who come to visit. A young man must have her permission to stay and talk with her, giving them a chance to know each other better. According to this tradition, he may stay overnight only after she has chosen him as a partner; otherwise, he must leave before dawn.

The hut is not completely enclosed, with a gap left by the doorway to symbolize restraint and boundaries. Kreung tradition strictly prohibit pregnancy before marriage. If the rules are broken, the girl’s family is expected to pay a fine to the village, as people traditionally believe that failing to do so could bring misfortune.

Today, however, modernization is gradually bringing the tradition to an end. Elders no longer pass these customs on to younger generations, and the “love hut” is slowly becoming a thing of the past. Most young people now meet through their phones and arrange to see each other, with motorcycles making it much easier to get around.

Heavenly Father, we entrust the Kreung people of Cambodia to You. May they long to enter a spiritual “love hut,” drawing near to Your presence and discovering more deeply the eternal love You have given us in Christ. May the small groups, fellowships, and gathering places established by churches and missionaries become safe spaces where Kreung people can talk openly, build relationships, and walk alongside one another, experiencing the love of Christ through genuine community. Protect Kreung young people growing up in the digital age. Raise up Christians to walk with them through the uncertainty of youth, helping them discover their worth and develop healthy relationships in Christ. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Healthier Together

The Kavet People



Imagine having malaria and urgently needing medical care, only to find that the nearest health center is 35 kilometers away. For the Kavet people, this was once a part of everyday life.

For many years, Kavet villages had very limited access to healthcare. When someone became ill, families often turned first to traditional healers, although treatment was often expensive and not always effective. Reaching a medical facility meant traveling 35 kilometers to the nearest health center. Roads were poorly maintained, and during the rainy season they became so muddy that people sometimes had to travel by boat. Some pregnant women even made the long, dangerous journey by driving themselves to the health center. Those who did make the journey could still face long waits because the health center was often overcrowded.

Things began to change in 2023. Plan International worked with local health authorities to establish a health center serving the Kavet community, providing primary healthcare with the aim of reducing maternal and infant mortality and childhood malnutrition.

The Kavet are a subgroup of the Brao people (see October 25) and live mainly in the northeastern provinces of Stung Treng and Ratanakiri. According to the 2019 census, there are over 7,000 Kavet people in Cambodia.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your care for the Kavet people, whom You created in Your image and deeply love. Use Plan International and the newly established health center to bless their communities and give people access to appropriate medical care. Send missionaries and Christians with medical expertise into Kavet villages. May they bring the compassion of Christ as they provide care and walk alongside those who are sick. At the same time, open doors for the gospel, so that the Kavet may come to know Jesus as the Lord who heals and saves. May they experience not only physical healing, but also renewal for wounded hearts. May the Kavet receive the hope of the gospel and find their home in You. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

When the Forest Was Lush

The Bunong People



In his 2025 documentary *We Are the Fruits of the Forest*, Cambodian director Rithy Panh presents a striking contrast between the past and present lives of the Bunong people of northeastern Cambodia.

In the past, the Bunong depended on the forest for their livelihood, collecting resin and honey, growing rice, and hunting for food. Their animist beliefs emphasized respect for nature and restraint in clearing land, helping to preserve the lush forests where they had lived for generations.

In recent years, however, large-scale logging and land development by companies have greatly changed their way of life. The Bunong now face questions their ancestors never had to consider: Should they use machinery to clear and cultivate the land? Should they rent back land that was once their own, or work for others for low wages? At the same time, climate change has made rice cultivation more difficult, while the loss of forests has sharply reduced what they can obtain through hunting. Their once-stable livelihoods are becoming increasingly uncertain. The Bunong interpret the increasingly frequent strong winds and heavy rains as the anger of the spirits at humanity's destruction of nature.

Through these changes, the film shows how the Bunong have been forced to confront industrialization and modernization. Under growing pressure to survive, their rich cultural traditions are gradually fading and are sometimes regarded by outsiders as backward or uncivilized.

Heavenly Father, You see the changes and uncertainty the Bunong people face because of land development. Comfort and strengthen them, and give them hope and strength as they adapt to a changing way of life. May Cambodian society learn to respect their culture. Guide the Cambodian government to develop just policies that balance economic development with the rights of minority communities, while helping the Bunong find other ways to support themselves and build more stable lives. Raise up Christians with relevant expertise and mission teams to walk alongside the Bunong as they face challenges such as climate change and land development. May they also share the gospel of peace with them, so that the Bunong may find comfort through knowing Christ the Savior. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Today, write your own prayer for Cambodia as the Spirit leads.

[illegible]

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